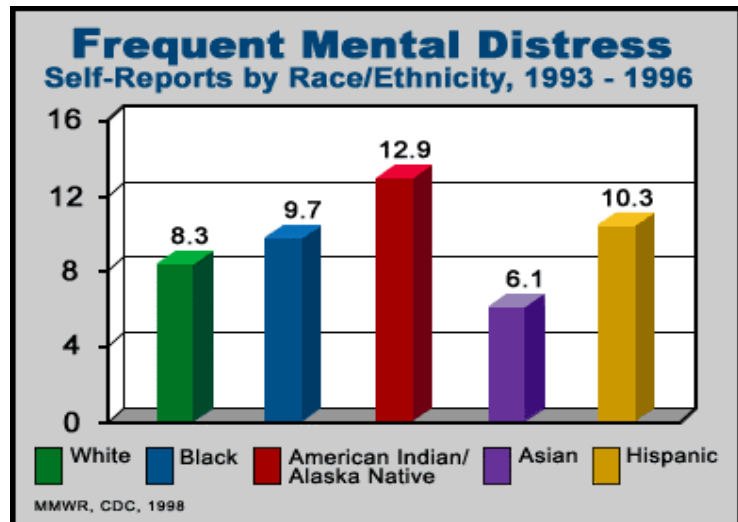


ISSUE

Greater than one-third of the demands made on health facilities in Indian country involve mental health and social service related concerns.

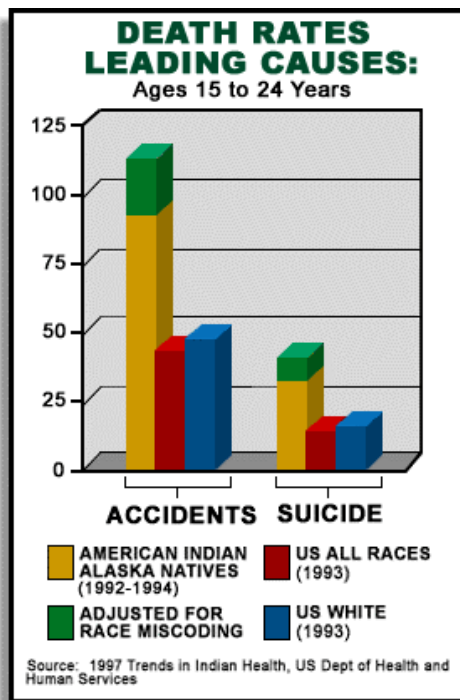
BACKGROUND

The Mental Health and Social Services program is a community oriented clinical and preventive service program whose activities are part of a broader, multidisciplinary behavioral health approach. Behavioral health teams are composed of psychologists, mental health counselors, psychiatrists, social workers, substance abuse counselors, and traditional healers. The composition of each team is tailored to the specific issue to be addressed. Substance abuse, trauma, and poverty often complicate the healing process for American Indians and Alaska Natives. Currently, Mental Health and Social Services programs promote the mental health of individuals, families, and communities by providing appropriate and culturally responsive intervention, treatment, and prevention services.



SITUATION

Considerable disparities exist in the psychological well being of American Indians and Alaska Natives. American Indians, compared to the general population, tend to underutilize services, experience higher therapy drop-out rates, are less likely to respond to treatment, and have negative opinions about non-Indian providers. The suicide rate for American Indians is 72% higher than the general population. The highest suicide rate is found in American Indians ages 15-34 compared to ages 74 and older for the general population. There is a significantly higher rate of poverty in American Indian and Alaska Native communities. Poverty often leads to a lack of housing and overcrowding in homes, as well as other socioeconomic, education, and health problems. Economic concerns are often related to domestic violence and childhood sexual abuse. The potential for mental health problems is evident.



OPTIONS/PLANS

Additional intervention and prevention strategies that meet specific needs of individuals, families, and communities are needed. Investing in inpatient, outpatient, home, and community services will have a dramatic effect on decreasing the need for direct health services to respond to the consequences of behavioral and mental health related issues.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For referral to the appropriate spokesperson, contact the IHS Public Affairs Staff at 301-443-3593.